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Wednesday, October 8, 2008

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Subject	Page
Children's Rights agreement*	2-12
Child support	13-14
Citizen engagement*	15-17
Food Stamp Challenge*	18
Fraud*	19
Health care	20
Juvenile	21
Poverty/summit*	22-25



October 8, 2008

Overhaul of state foster care system approved

*BY MEGHA SATYANARAYANA
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER*

More caseworkers and better health care are part of an estimated \$250-million package of reforms mandated in the settlement approved Tuesday of a class-action lawsuit on behalf of Michigan's foster children.

The agreement mandates broad changes over the next 5 years for a state system described by the children's attorneys as "missing its mark far too often."

One key change requires a statewide 24-hour hotline for reporting abuse and neglect, replacing individual county hotlines. Another mandates hiring of a medical director for foster children's health care, due to reports of overmedicating as well as medical neglect. The changes affect the Michigan Department of Human Services and private agencies it works with.

The agreement also focused efforts on adoption or family reunification, as some children have spent a year or longer in limbo.

"No settlement, indeed, no finding of the lawsuit is going to fix every problem. It goes about as far as it could possibly go, and it is my pleasure to approve it," said U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds, who praised both sides for preventing a prolonged and costly trial.

The settlement comes after nearly two years of disagreement between the Michigan Department of Human Services, which oversees the nation's seventh-largest foster care system, and New York-based Children's Rights, a child advocacy group that filed the 2006 lawsuit, claiming the state did not protect its wards from abuse and neglect. The sides were set to go to trial on July 7, when an eleventh-hour settlement was tentatively reached. It is to be signed Oct. 24.

Of the 19,000 children in the system, 6,000 are ready for adoption and 7,000 live with family that aren't registered for benefits with the state, said lead children's attorney Sara Bartosz.

"It's a large system, and the degree of chaos was extraordinary," said Marcia Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights. She said such lawsuits serve an unfortunate accountability function for states that do not uphold children's constitutional rights.

The reforms will be monitored by the four-member Public Catalyst Group, which helped overhaul the New Jersey foster care system after a similar lawsuit. Should the state fail to uphold the agreement, Children's Rights could bring DHS back to court to devise a new one or pursue contempt hearings. Also, the federal government could take over the agency.

Bartosz referenced deaths in Michigan's foster care system as a catalyst for the lawsuit. The Free Press examined the 2006 deaths of 2-year-olds Allison Newman and Isaac Lethbridge, who were killed while in separate foster homes, and Ricky Holland, 7, killed in 2005 by his foster-adoptive parents.

Child advocates call this a bittersweet but historic day for foster children.

"An outside group had to come in to force the hand of Michigan. It's a great day for foster kids," said Jack Kresnak, former Free Press reporter and president of the advocacy group Michigan's Children.

The state's immediate concern is getting eligible children adopted, said DHS Deputy Director

Kathryne O'Grady. Some have been cleared for a year or more, and the state is looking for adoptive families. She said the department already is addressing hiring issues and has asked the state Legislature for about \$50 million to scrutinize current needs and begin implementing the program in 2009.

The settlement comes at the same time as a federal law signed Tuesday by President George W. Bush that allows foster children to stay in the system until they are 21 and provides federal assistance to relatives who become foster parents for children in their family. There are 500,000 children in foster care nationwide.

Contact **MEGHA SATYANARAYANA** at 313-223-4544 or megha@freepress.com.



Reforms coming to state foster care system

By MEGHA SATYANARAYANA • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • October 7, 2008

A federal judge today approved a massive settlement of a lawsuit filed on behalf of 19,000 Michigan foster children.

In a few days, the settlement will be signed, bringing broad reforms for a state system described by the children's attorneys as "missing its mark far too often."

The settlement comes after nearly two years of heated negotiations between the Michigan Department of Human Services, which oversees the nation's seventh largest foster care system, and Children's Rights, a New York-based child advocacy group that filed the class action lawsuit, saying the state did not keep its wards "free from harm." The sides were set to go to trial on July 7, when an eleventh-hour settlement was reached.

"It goes about as far as it could possibly go, and it is my pleasure to approve it," said U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds, who praised both sides for preventing a prolonged and costly trial.

The reforms will spread throughout the agency and its private partners over a five year span ending in 2013, from hiring more case workers to ensuring basic mental and physical health care for state wards. In a rare move, DHS will hire a medical director to in part oversee what many believe is overuse of behavioral and psychotropic medications in the foster care system.

The lead plaintiff, Dwayne B., now age nine, was on multiple psychotropic drugs to stabilize his mood and behavior, which the lawsuit said became worse with each of eight moves while in the system. He is still awaiting adoption.

The lawsuit emphasizes "permanency," be it reunification with birth parents, or severing of parental rights and a push for adoption. Of the 19,000 children in the system, 6,000 are ready for adoption and 7,000 live with family that isn't registered for benefits with the state.

"It's a large system, and the degree of chaos was extraordinary," said Marcia Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights. She said lawsuits such as theirs serve an "unfortunate" accountability function for states that do not uphold children's rights.

Lead children's attorney Sara Bartosz referenced the deaths of three children in Michigan's foster care system as a catalyst for the lawsuit. The Free Press examined the 2006 deaths of Allison Newman, age 2, and Isaac Lethbridge, age 2, who were killed while in separate foster homes, and Ricky Holland, age 7, killed in 2005 by his foster-adoptive parents. The Free Press revealed numerous missteps by DHS, among others, that led to his death.

The state's immediate concern is getting eligible children adopted, said DHS Deputy Director Kathryn O'Grady. Some have been cleared for a year or more, and they are looking for adoptive families. She said they are already addressing hiring issues and have asked the state Legislature for about \$50 million to scrutinize their current needs and to begin implementing the program in 2009.

The reforms will be monitored by the four-member Public Catalyst Group, who helped overhaul the New Jersey foster care system after a similar lawsuit.



October 8, 2008

What foster care agreement mandates

Under a class-action settlement approved Tuesday, Michigan's foster care system could be taken over by the federal government if the state Department of Human Services fails to implement several reforms over the next 5 years. The terms require the state to:

- Create a specific children's services office to oversee foster care administration.
 - Create a 24-hour centralized hotline for calls about abuse and neglect.
 - Hire more foster care workers and caseworkers to reduce caseloads.
 - Reduce the amount of time between removing a child and either reunification or removing parental rights.
 - Reduce the amount of time between removing parental rights and adoption.
 - Register family members with DHS to receive support services for caring for a child.
 - Ensure better access to health care, including mental health; appoint a medical director for foster children; reduce the use of psychotropic medicines as discipline.
 - Recruit and retain more foster parents and adoptive families, and provide better oversight of foster homes.
-



Tuesday, October 7, 2008

Court-appointed monitor to oversee Michigan's foster care system

Paul Egan / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A federal judge on Tuesday said she will put the state's child protection and foster care services under the oversight of a court-appointed monitor, while hailing what she called a historic agreement to improve the health and safety of Michigan's 19,000 foster children.

The settlement approved by U.S. District Judge Nancy G. Edmunds ends a class-action lawsuit brought in 2006 by Children's Rights, a national advocacy group based in New York, alleging Michigan's foster care system was broken and harming foster kids.

Edmunds, who will keep jurisdiction over the case, named former New Jersey Child Advocate Kevin M. Ryan as a court-appointed monitor over Michigan's Department of Human Services.

The settlement requires the state to hire 200 to 300 workers and clear backlogs in the licensing of foster care homes and the permanent adoption of children, among other reforms.

"I congratulate both sides on having reached a historic and ... a very fine agreement," Edmunds told lawyers in the case.

Sara Bartosz, senior staff attorney with Children's Rights, said similar court appointments of monitors under settlements known as consent decrees have been ordered to protect children in New Jersey, New Mexico and Kansas City, Mo., among other jurisdictions, where "very significant and measurable improvements were made."

A cost figure for implementing the settlement over the next five years was not immediately available from state officials.

The well-publicized deaths in 2005 and 2006 of three children in Michigan foster care -- Ricky Holland of Williamston, Isaac Lethbridge of Detroit, and Allison Newman of Canton Township -- prompted a scandal within the state Department of Human Services and promises to reform.

"This settlement is truly a landmark victory for the thousands of children dependent on Michigan's child welfare system," Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, said in a news release.

You can reach Paul Egan at (313) 222-2069 or pegan@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081007/METRO/810070443>



Wednesday, October 8, 2008

State's foster system gets fed monitor

Class-action lawsuit settlement means Mich. to enforce stricter rules.

Paul Egan / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A court-appointed monitor will oversee what a federal judge on Tuesday described as a historic agreement to improve the health and safety of Michigan's 19,000 foster children.

The deal approved by U.S. District Judge Nancy G. Edmunds ends a class-action lawsuit brought in 2006 by Children's Rights, a national advocacy group based in New York, alleging Michigan's foster care system was broken and harming kids.

It also could mean \$50 million a year in additional costs for cash-strapped Michigan's Department of Human Services.

The settlement is a tacit admission of failings in the state's child protection system that were highlighted through the well-publicized deaths in 2005 and 2006 of three children in foster care -- Ricky Holland of Williamston, Isaac Lethbridge of Detroit, and Allison Newman of Canton.

The settlement requires the state to hire 200 to 300 "planning specialists" and clear backlogs in the licensing of foster care homes and the permanent adoption of children, among other reforms. It requires the establishment of a 24-hour centralized hot line for the reporting of suspected child abuse to replace the present system, under which reporting is made at the county level. And it sets 15 as the maximum case load for foster care workers, who in some cases today have 30 to 40 foster children to check on.

Edmunds, who will keep jurisdiction over the case, named former New Jersey Child Advocate Kevin M. Ryan as a monitor, who will file twice-yearly reports and try to assure the state makes the promised reforms.

"I congratulate both sides on having reached a historic and ... a very fine agreement," Edmunds told lawyers in the case.

Kathryne O'Grady, a deputy director of the department who will head the new Children's Services Administration required under the settlement, said most of the reforms reflect changes the department was already planning to make.

"The department knew from the beginning that we had to make substantial changes," O'Grady said. "The department is really excited to get moving on these changes."

O'Grady, who said the department also will hire about 200 more foster care workers in addition to the planning specialists, could provide no firm cost to implement the changes. She said the Legislature

appropriated an extra \$27.5 million for 2007-08 and another \$20-25 million in state money is being looked at for 2008-09.

Though times are tough, legislators know the money is needed, she said.

Jack Kresnak, president and CEO of the advocacy group Michigan's Children, said departmental and other estimates he has seen peg the cost of the reforms at \$50 million a year over the next five years, compared to over \$100 million a year if the plaintiffs had received everything they wanted.

"Ensuring the safety of Michigan's most vulnerable children cannot be done on the cheap," Kresnak said. The settlement "is more than likely going to prevent some tragic deaths."

A federal monitor is the same solution a judge ordered in 2003 to fix longstanding problems of police brutality and dismal holding cell conditions at the Detroit Police Department. That work continues.

Edmunds said she will enter the final order formalizing the settlement Oct. 24.

You can reach Paul Egan at (313) 222-2069 or pegan@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081008/POLITICS/810080395>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

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Wednesday, October 8, 2008

Editorial: State should control child welfare system

If Michigan officials meet lawsuit terms, feds should yield oversight

The Detroit News

Detroit Federal Judge Nancy Edmunds has ordered that Michigan's Child Protective Services program report to a court-appointed monitor. The monitor will check on the state's progress in meeting the terms of a settlement agreement for the next five years.

Certainly, the state's foster care system needs attention. During the past several years, there have been several child deaths and injuries in the system, resulting in criminal trials and legislative inquiries as well as the federal court lawsuit. Still, the foster care system must emerge from federal oversight in the minimum time possible.

The state's foster care system now joins the Detroit Police Department and the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department under federal supervision.

The monitor will apparently operate in a manner similar to court-ordered monitors for two federal consent decrees for the Police Department. Those monitoring programs have been extended.

That shouldn't be the case with the Child Protective Services program. While the foster care program reached a settlement with a national child advocacy group in a federal court case, the state had also taken steps to improve the system through reports from the Foster Care Review Board and various analyses and reports from state judges.

It's not as if the administration of Gov. Jennifer Granholm or other members of state government ignored the problems in the child welfare system.

The settlement calls for the hiring of additional case workers, the reduction of caseloads for each employee and the clarification of standards for investigations of child abuse. The cost of the settlement terms is estimated at \$50 million annually over the next several years.

State government now has an obligation to live up to the terms of its court settlement and make sure that real changes are made to ensure the safety of the children within its care. If it does that, the federal court and monitor should be willing to relinquish oversight of the system within a reasonable time.



MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 194, VOLUME 47-- TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7 2008

Judges makes foster care settlement official

Making the multi-million dollar overhaul of the state's foster care system official, U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds' approved the settlement between the Department of Human Services and the organization Children's Rights on Tuesday.

With department officials already at work making the changes outlined in the agreement, the judge's approval was really just a formality, but was necessary in order to call the [settlement](#) official, DHS officials said in September when they laid out their plans for delivering children's services in coming years (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, September 17, 2008](#)).

"This settlement is truly a landmark victory for the thousands of children dependent on Michigan's child welfare system," said Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of Children's Rights, a national children's advocacy group.

"While the improvements won't happen overnight, the court's approval of this agreement gives Michigan's children power they've never had before: a binding commitment from state officials to make the system better and the authority to go back to court if the state fails to deliver."

The advocacy group Michigan's Children released a statement Tuesday congratulating the state and Children's Rights for reaching a "fair, equitable and adequate agreement that will improve Michigan's foster care system in definitive and measurable ways."

"Although this will not fix every problem in the system, it will go a long way toward improving outcomes for children in foster care, saving lives and ensuring the safety, well-being and permanency of 19,000 children in Michigan's foster care system," said Jack Kresnak, CEO of Michigan's Children.

In response to the spending from reforms that DHS estimates will exceed \$50 million over the next four years, Mr. Kresnak said: "Yes, it will (come) at a time when funds are scarce, require some extra funding from lawmakers and the administration to improv(e) investigations of abuse and neglect, and hire more caseworkers. But these reforms are desperately needed, and ensuring the safety of Michigan's most vulnerable children cannot be done on the cheap."

Children's Rights released a statement saying that Judge Edmunds "hailed the settlement as going as far as possible to address the system's problems and put in place the best means of solving them."

A court order compelling the state to implement the reforms will be entered on October 24, resolving the first phase of the lawsuit. The settlement then lays out several incremental deadlines for making small improvements within the department over the years, which DHS has said it fully intends to meet.

Overview

On August 8, 2006 Children's Rights filed a class action lawsuit in federal court seeking to reform the failing foster care system in the state of Michigan. The complaint alleges that the state violated the constitutional, federal statutory, and federal common law rights of children in foster care by:

- Failing to move children quickly into safe, stable, permanent homes either through reunification with their birth families or adoption,
- Failing to provide children with adequate medical, dental and mental health services,
- Failing to provide safe and stable foster homes, and
- Failing to prepare children who will age out of the foster care system at the age of majority to live independently as adults.
-

The complaint further charges that Michigan's child welfare system is poorly managed, underfunded, and dangerously understaffed, creating conditions that put the children in its custody at risk of serious harm.

Michigan operates the nation's seventh largest foster care system, with approximately 19,000 abused and neglected children in its custody.

Following two failed attempts at reaching a deal to settle the case in early 2007 and May 2008, Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm signed a sweeping settlement agreement on July 3, 2008. The state's progress in complying with the agreement will be overseen by a monitor who will report to the federal court, and Children's Rights will remain involved as long as necessary to ensure that the required reforms are made and maintained.

October 8, 2008

Sweeps successful in nabbing parents behind on support

The Livingston County Friend of the Court has put into practice warrant sweeps to help nab parents who are behind in their child-support payments.

The sweeps are simple enough: Officers from local law enforcement track down parents behind in their child support, visiting their last-known address.

The effort has paid off tremendously. Dozens of parents who've been neglecting their child-support payments have been arrested, while others voluntarily turned themselves in when they learned the authorities were looking for them.

The sweeps are a resounding success, with the winners being the kids.

The unpaid child support represented by those taken in through the sweeps totals in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, affecting dozens and dozens of kids.

Friend of the Court Melissa Scharrer said it best: "A child has two parents. Both have the obligation to support their children. It's an obligation and a privilege to do that for your children."

Children need and deserve the support of both their parents; unfortunately, divorce and failed relationships between the adults often affects how willingly the non-custodial parent comes across with their child support.

That some of these parents don't take responsibility and keep up their part of the bargain is a tragedy that affects innocent kids in whatever situation caused the family to come apart.

The Friend of the Court is hoping to conduct four sweeps during the next fiscal year, which begins in October.

While most of the arrests resulting from the sweeps occurred in Livingston County, some have reached as far as West Branch in Ogemaw County, Newaygo in Newaygo County, and Flint.

During the recently completed sweeps in August and September, the average age of those arrested was 27, and of the 34 people arrested, six of them were women.

The parents targeted are at least \$5,000 behind in their child support and have failed to appear for a hearing to explain why they are behind in their payments.

These sweeps are important. They benefit the kids in a huge way.

They benefit the taxpayers of the state of Michigan, too, who pick up the slack of the parent who's not paying the court-ordered support.

In the end, the sweeps are a necessary tool. It's a shame that not all parents support their children. It's a shame that the long arm of the law must step in to make unwilling parents take responsibility for their kids.

It's true: No child comes into this world without two parents. It's tragic that for some kids, those two parents don't support them equally.

In those sad circumstances, it's good that the Friend of the Court sweeps help get the kids the support they need.

If you are a parent who is in need of help with a child-support case, call the Livingston County Friend of the Court at (517) 546-0230.

Voter Rolls Grow As States Help Poor People Register

By [Scott Novakowski](#), Demos.org. Posted [October 7, 2008](#).
www.alternet.org

As North Carolina, Michigan, Virginia and Missouri ask public aid recipients if they want to register to vote, thousands of new voters are added.



Elections officials are already anticipating record turnout in states across the country. Much media attention has been paid to the massive numbers of new voters – many from historically underrepresented communities – that have been registered to vote this election cycle. To that end, several states have made significant improvements in their effort to comply with a federal law meant specifically to boost participation, and representation, of low-income Americans.

U.S. citizens on the bottom end of the income scale have historically been underrepresented in our electorate. Just looking at the numbers from 2006 tells us how far we haven't come: only 60 percent of citizens in households making less than \$25,000 were registered to vote compared to 80 percent of those in households making \$100,000 or more. The National Voter Registration Act, passed in 1993, sought to close this gap by, among other things, requiring public assistance agencies to offer voter registration services to their clients. [Research](#) by Demos and our partners reveals that, even 15 years after the law was passed, many states are failing in their responsibility to adequately implement the NVRA's agency-based registration requirement. While the law's "motor voter" provision is widely implemented and well-known, this other -- known as Section 7 of the law -- has been long ignored.

Several states, however, have seen enormous progress in the past months in providing low-income citizens the opportunity to register. Thanks to the bold actions and dedication of election and public assistance officials in North Carolina, Michigan, and Virginia, as well as a recent court order in Missouri, tens of thousands of low-income voters now have an opportunity to participate in the upcoming election.

North Carolina

After being presented with statistical data and evidence from field investigations indicating noncompliance in summer 2006, the North Carolina State Board of Elections, led by Executive Director Gary Bartlett, acted quickly to put in place an effective re-implementation [plan](#). As a result of the plan and follow-up work conducted by Mr. Bartlett and the SBOE, North Carolina's public assistance agencies registered over 63,000 voters since February 2007, an average of 3,152 voters per month. In contrast, the state only registered 11,607 voters in all of 2005-2006, an average of only 484 voters per month. In all, North Carolina has experienced a six-fold increase in the number of registration in their public assistance offices.

Michigan

Under the leadership of Director Ismael Ahmed, Michigan's Department of Human Services began working with Demos in early 2008 to design and implement a comprehensive Civic Engagement Initiative. DHS' initiative went beyond the minimal requirements of providing voter registration services to include public service announcements by Michigan celebrities, partnerships with community groups such as the League of Women Voters, and Voter Registration Fairs, events that included demonstrations of voting machines and copies of sample ballots. Since implementing a new computerized data collection system in March 2008, Michigan DHS offices registered over 21,456 voters, an average of 3,065 per month.

Virginia

In the ten years since initial implementation in 1995-1996, the number of applications from Virginia's public assistance agencies declined at least 87 percent, from 54,051 applications to only 7,030. Investigations by Demos' partner Democracy South found that seven of nine offices visited did not even have voter registration applications on site. Within weeks of being presented with these findings, officials from the Virginia Department of Social Services and the State Board of Elections agreed to a meeting in Richmond with representatives from Demos, Democracy South, the Virginia Organizing Project, the state Conference of the NAACP, and the ACLU. A compliance plan was adopted within days and, within a month, all employees were trained on voter registration procedures and a data collection system was in place. In June, July, and August, VDSS has registered 6,769 public assistance clients. The first few months of data indicate an almost eight-fold increase in registrations as a result of their compliance plan.

Missouri

In July 2008, a federal court in Kansas City ordered the Missouri Department of Social Services to fully implement the NVRA at its public assistance offices. Plaintiffs ACORN and a Missouri resident were represented by Demos, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Project Vote, Dewey & LeBoeuf and local counsel. In her ruling, the

judge found that the state's own records indicated that DSS was approximately one million forms short of the number needed to be in compliance with the law. Furthermore, at least one employee had allowed completed voter registration forms to pile up on her desk for a year without turning them in to election officials.

Registrations in DSS offices skyrocketed as a result of the judge's order. In a single month, DSS offices registered over 17,600 voters. In comparison, Missouri's public assistance agencies (which also includes the Department of Health and Senior Services) registered only 15,500 voters in all of 2005 and 2006, an average of only 649 registrations per month. When ordered to comply with the law, Missouri DSS increased its average number of registrations per month by some 2,600 percent.

In state after state, recent agency-based compliance efforts are proven to dramatically increase voter registrations among lower-income Americans. These states are now realizing the promise of the NVRA, and in the process, doing a great service to the people in their states whose voice in government is too often drowned out.

The adoption of similar plans nationwide could go a long way in eliminating the income gap that has marred the U.S. election system for decades.

Scott Novakowski is a Senior Policy Analyst in the Democracy Program at [Demos](#), a non-partisan public policy center. For the last three years he has been working on a national campaign to improve state compliance with the National Voter Registration Act, in addition to extensive research and writing on election administration and voting rights concerns in the U.S.



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Take the Michigan Food Stamp Challenge

Leading up to the 2008 Voices for Action Poverty Summit, the Voices for Action Network is partnering with the [Food Bank Council of Michigan](#) to recruit and add to the 100 Michigan leaders taking the Food Stamp Challenge from Monday, Oct. 13, 2008, through Friday, Oct. 17, 2008.

The purpose of the Food Stamp Challenge is to:

Increase public awareness of the challenges and perceptions of participants in the food stamp program.

Increase monetary and food donations to Michigan food banks.

Increase the number of volunteers for Michigan soup kitchens.

Obtain a first-hand experience of eating at a soup kitchen and hearing the challenges of Michigan citizens.

The federal Food Stamp Program helps more than 26 million low-income people purchase food for themselves and their families, including nearly 600,000 Michigan residents. The program is designed as a safety net to help ensure people have access to food during difficult economic times. The majority of the recipients leave the program within nine months. More than half of food stamp recipients are children and eight percent are over 60 years of age.

The Voices for Action Network is requesting leaders all across Michigan to sign up and take the food stamp challenge from Monday Oct. 13, 2008, through Friday, Oct. 17, 2008. By accepting the challenge, you are making the following commitments:

Spend a total of \$29.35 (average of \$5.87 per day) for food and non-alcoholic beverages, including purchased meals, during the challenge. (You are unable to purchase alcohol in the food stamp program.)

Keep track of receipts on food spending and take note of your experiences throughout the five days.

Optional Commitments

Donate food and/or money to a food bank in Michigan.

Sign up to volunteer and volunteer at a soup kitchen in Michigan before Dec. 31, 2008.

Eat at a soup kitchen, does not account against your allotment, in Michigan.

To find the locations of the closest food bank or free meal site, follow this link to the [Michigan Food Bank Council's county-by-county listing for food resources](#).

If you're interested in showing your support for the Food Stamp Challenge, please complete this [Pledge Form](#) and return via email at voices4action@michigan.gov or via fax at 517-241-8390. Participants are encouraged to share their experiences through the [Michigan Food Stamp Challenge Blog](#).

<http://www.michigan.gov/poverty/0,1607,7-253-193569-,00.html>

This entry was written by Betsy Thompson, posted on October 7, 2008 at 1:40 pm



Alleged fraud in welfare case

October 08, 2008 12:00 am

TRAVERSE CITY -- A Buckley woman faces felony fraud charges stemming from a welfare case.

Tonya Lynae Kiel, 42, was charged with two counts of fraud after a state Department of Human Services investigation. She hadn't been arrested Tuesday morning.

From August to November 2006, Kiel applied for and received nearly \$800 in food stamps and about \$1,600 in cash assistance, court records show. During that time, Kiel allegedly failed to inform DHS that she was employed.

Had DHS known she was employed, she would have received only \$64 in food stamps and about \$140 in cash assistance, investigators said.

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October 7, 2008

Health care rights and responsibilities

For all the difficulty he had keeping the candidates to their agreed-upon time limits, I was glad to hear moderator Tom Brokaw attempt to nail down presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama on the fundamental question of the health care debate. In this country, is health care your right or your responsibility?

If it's the former, then it's a government obligation; the latter, you're on your own. Right now, we make it a right only for those over 65 through federal Medicare and for low-income children through state-run Medicaid. Most people fall somewhere in-between and 47 million of them have no health care. That means when they have a real problem or are injured, they show up at emergency rooms. In Michigan, non-profit hospitals provide \$2.6 billion a year in uncompensated care. That adds to everybody's costs.

Democrat Obama was more forthright. It is, he said, unconscionable that in such a prosperous country we cannot deliver health care as a right. He stops short of coming out for socialized medicine in the style of Canada or Britain, but he comes a lot closer to it than McCain, who sees health care as more of your responsibility. McCain, however, would give you some of your tax dollars back to use in shopping for the best coverage you can buy. He would also, however, tax any employer-provided benefits as part of your income.

I agree that health care ought to be a right but I shudder at the thought of creating a massive federal bureaucracy to deliver it. However, the free market system has gotten us in the mess we're in, where health care costs are a leading cause of personal bankruptcies and nobody – neither providers nor patients nor employers nor insurers – is happy with the system. If Obama says it's a right, he needs a better plan to guarantee it. But I prefer the direction from which he comes on this issue.

News

Nathaniel Abraham gets 93 days for driving with a suspended license

Tuesday, October 7, 2008 9:24 AM EDT

By ANN ZANIEWSKI
Of The Oakland Press

Already in jail for violating his bond on a drug charge, Nathaniel "Nate" Abraham was sentenced Monday to 93 days in jail for driving with a suspended license.

Abraham, who made national headlines for killing a man at age 11, was stopped by Auburn Hills police May 28 for not wearing a seat belt. An officer discovered that Abraham's license was suspended. Abraham was arrested and released with a citation, eventually paying the \$90 seat belt fine.

Abraham, 22, pleaded guilty Sept. 3 to a misdemeanor charge of driving with a suspended license. Judge Julie Nicholson, of the 52-3 District Court, said Monday that he was not a suitable candidate for probation. In addition to the jail sentence, Abraham also has to pay fines.

When asked by the judge if he wanted to say anything, Abraham replied, "No, ma'am."

Two days after the Auburn Hills traffic stop, Abraham was arrested in Pontiac when police found 254 Ecstasy pills in the trunk of his car at a gas station. He was charged with possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, a felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison, and a charge of driving with a suspended license.

Abraham was released on bond. But the tether he wore tracked him repeatedly leaving his mother's Pontiac house without permission, a violation of the conditions of his bond. Oakland Circuit Judge Daniel P. O'Brien revoked his bond and Abraham has been in jail since August.

Abraham has a Nov. 17 trial date for the drug possession charge. Abraham's attorney, Byron Pitts, will argue at an Oct. 15 hearing that the drugs police found with Abraham should not be admitted as trial evidence.

Abraham was 11 years old when he fatally shot 18-yearold Ronnie Greene Jr. outside a Pontiac party store. He was convicted of second-degree murder but a juvenile sentence allowed him to be released in January 2007, a day before his 21st birthday.

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Join battle against poverty in Michigan

BY ISMAEL AHMED

No state has been hit harder by the national economic crisis than Michigan. We have lost hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs. Our communities are dotted by thousands of foreclosed homes. And too many of our fellow citizens face the daily challenge of not having enough to eat.

More than 1.3 million people in our state receive a maximum of \$5.87 per day for food from the federal food stamp program -- just under \$2 per meal. Known in Michigan as the Food Assistance program, it is part of a safety net for such people as the woman I talked to a few weeks ago, a mother of four in the Upper Peninsula.

She works 70 hours a week and still isn't making enough to feed her family, so she supplements her budget with food stamps. More than a million people in Michigan will also visit a local food bank this year -- and the need is growing. In some parts of Michigan, emergency food providers are reporting 20%-25% increases in the number of people seeking help with food this year.

To better understand the hardship that a meager budget imposes on families, leaders from across Michigan are taking the "Food Stamp Challenge" the week of Oct. 13. This includes my wife, Margaret, and me, Grand Valley State University President Thomas Hass, United Way of Southeastern Michigan CEO Mike Brennan, Compuware Regional Vice President Bob Kennedy, and dozens of community, education, business and political leaders, including Gov. Jennifer Granholm and members of her cabinet.

I hope you will consider joining us, too. And when you've completed the challenge of eating for a week on the equivalent of a food stamp budget, I hope you'll consider a donation to the Harvest Gathering, an annual event to raise food and money to support the state's nine regional food banks that serve agencies helping people in all 83 Michigan counties.

As important as it is that we support these programs that offer immediate help to our citizens, we must also keep working on long-term solutions to end poverty.

From the governor's No Worker Left Behind initiative, which trains workers who have lost their jobs to the expansion of quality preschool opportunities for low-income children, we are tackling this issue of poverty in substantive ways.

On Nov. 13, policymakers, low-income residents and service providers from across the state will gather at Cobo Center in Detroit for the Voices for Action 2008 Poverty Summit. Together they will look for ways to ensure that as Michigan's economy recovers, our poorest citizens are not left behind.

This first-of-its-kind summit in Michigan is sponsored by the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Governor's Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity, and the Michigan Community Action Agency Association. It's not just a one-day event, but the kickoff of a statewide initiative to reduce poverty and maximize economic opportunities.

After the event, participants will continue to work together on practical solutions they can implement back home.

We are working on creating the new economic opportunity that is the only long-term answer to poverty. In the meantime, there are things we can do to ease the hardships our poorest citizens face.

So join me in taking the first step by participating in the Food Stamp Challenge. It's a challenge worth

taking on. And after you've taken the challenge, put your support into action by contributing to the Harvest Gathering.

For more information or to sign up for the challenge, please visit www.michigan.gov/poverty and click on Food Stamp Challenge. To donate to the Harvest Gathering, please visit www.feedmichigan.org.

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Detroit, Once America's Fourth Largest City, Struggles to Halt Decline

By Barry Wood

Washington

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<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-10-07-voa24.cfm>

Detroit, Michigan-the home of America's big three car companies - is where the world's auto industry was born. But along with the car companies it depends on, this Midwestern city is experiencing hard times. VOA's Barry Wood reports from Detroit about the formidable challenges confronting the city.



Downtown Detroit

Detroit was once a grand and prosperous city. But race riots 40 years ago and white flight to the suburbs took a toll.

Today much of Detroit is abandoned. A population that once approached two million has fallen by over half.

"I think the city of Detroit, like the auto industry, is at the bottom," says Keith Crain, who publishes *Crain's Detroit Business*. "It has lost well over a million people who have just exited to the suburbs."

The steady erosion of the auto industry has taken the city to a new low.

Unemployment is nearly 10 percent. One-third of the population lives below the poverty line.

One kilometer from the city center, homeless people camp where trains once arrived and the Detroit Tigers played baseball. One homeless man exclaimed, "I don't want no food stamps. I'm used to working."

On Detroit's once prosperous east side, unemployed teacher Leslie Smith says he's never seen such a bad economy. "We've been in a depression for five years, where other people are just getting hit," Smith said.

With jobs scarce and the property market distressed, Smith is pessimistic. "I didn't even want my daughter to come back to Detroit to try to find a job" Smith said. "I'd rather she found one somewhere else. I've got three degrees and can't find a job."



Keith Crain

Small businessman Daniel Goree says Detroit remains racially polarized. His

heating business connects him with all ethnic groups, including the large Arab-American community. "The black people fear and distrust the white people," Goree said. "The white people have a stigma about what a black person is. And the Arabs, they're in the middle."



Leslie Smith

Eighty-five percent of Detroit's population is black. Despite hard times, there are signs of progress. Parts of the downtown are flourishing.

Grace Keros, third generation owner of a landmark diner, is optimistic. "New buildings, new places to see, people moving back into the city, investing in the city, believing in the city," Keros said. "Just look around, compared to two years ago, look what's happened, actually since the Super Bowl [the championship football match in 2006]."

For the moment Detroit appears balanced between desolation and renewal. But which way it will go is unclear.